

8. ON FACTORS GOVERNING THE DISTRIBUTION OF WILD MAMMALS  
IN KARNATAKA—A COMMENTS

S. Narendra Prasad *et al.* (*JBNHS* 75, No. 3) have made a commendable effort in their paper to present a consolidated picture of distribution of wild mammals in Karnataka. I am sure, this paper, though admittedly based on subjective methodology, will be quite useful for those interested in scientific wild life management in Karnataka. As an amateur naturalist who has investigated the status of wild life in some of these forests in the past fifteen years, I have some comments on this pioneering effort.

1. As pointed out by the authors food availability is perhaps the main reason for the comparatively higher abundance of larger mammals in dry/moist deciduous forests as against evergreen western ghat forests in Karnataka. However, another important factor is that historically the region with evergreen forests has had a greater abundance of fire-arms and tradition of hunting when compared to the deciduous forest regions. This also has, in my opinion, decisively affected the current population status of larger wild mammals.

2. Though the paper covers 86 forest ranges, some other forest ranges/areas which do harbour wild mammals have been omitted for some reason. Some of these are: Bhadravathi, Tarikere and Channagiri (all in Malnad region). Hunsur, and Periyapatna (Mysore plateau region). Arasikere, Melkote, Chitradurga, Chittapur, Chincholi, and Sandur (all in Maidaan region).

3. The various maps and tables giving the occurrence ratings and frequency are based on Table 7, which forms the foundation for the whole exercise. In my opinion, the data on population status may not be entirely accurate,

in some cases particularly for the 'Crest line' and 'Malnad' regions. This has led to some errors in the occurrence ratings. For example the herbivores except the elephants are certainly more abundant in the 'Crest line' region between Kollur and Charmadi rather than between Charmadi and Mercara as shown in the paper.

4. I am comparing below the information I have obtained during my field investigations with those of the paper. In the Mysore plateau, Crest line, and Malnad regions I have indicated the current population status of various mammals, which I feel is more accurate. Also I have added some information on some additional mammals and areas excluded from the paper. The notations used are the same as in the paper; 0 = absent, 4 = very common, 3 = frequent, 2 = present, 1 = rare, and - = no information. The figures indicated in brackets are from the paper.

4.1 ELEPHANT: In the 'Crest line' region their status is; Byndoor range —0 (1), Coondapur range —0 (1), Periyapatna range 1 (—). There seems to be a curious 'gap' in their distribution between 'Charmadi' and Kollur in the western ghats. Superficially there does not seem to be any ecological reason for this 'Elephant gap'.

4.2 GAUR: Their population status in some of the ranges is Byndoor 2 (—), Shankaranarayana 2 (1), Hebri 2 (1), Karkala 2 (1), Agumbe 2 (1) and Periyapatna 1 (—). It is a curious fact that they seem to be raiding crops only in some parts of their range like South Kanara District but not in Muthodi and Lakka-valli.

4.3 SPOTTED DEER : Their status is Periyapatna 1 (—), Hunsur 1 (—). It is remarkable that these Deer which are normally inhabitants of dry/moist deciduous forests have adapted to the evergreen forest/shola type of mountain biome to the east of Kudremukh mines where a few survive. This is perhaps the only region in south-India where they have adapted to such a habitat.

4.4 SAMBAR : They are present in many of the 'Crest line' ranges and I feel their status may be as below : Byndoor 2 (1), Shankaranarayana 2 (0), Hebri 1 (0), Karkala 2 (1), Periyapatna 1 (—) and Tarikere 1 (—).

4.5 BARKING DEER : These appear to be ecologically, the most adaptive species of Deer and thrive in all habitats except the dry scrub of the plains. Where given protection they seem to increase rapidly like the spotted deer and lose some of their shyness.

4.6 FOUR HORNED ANTELOPE : I have heard of them reported from Sunkadakatte, A. M. Gudi and Begur areas (Mysore plateau), Kanakapura (Kollegal Hills). They formerly existed in Bhadravathi and Kadur of Malnad region where their current status is unknown.

4.7 BLACKBUCK : They are reported from Ranibennur and parts of Raichur and Gulbarga districts. They also probably occur as scattered remnant populations in the arid parts of Bellary, Mandya, Hassan and Mysore districts.

4.8 CHINKARA : These are sporadically found along with Blackbuck populations. They are reported from Dharwar and Gulbarga districts. I have seen a captive specimen recently obtained in Dharwar district.

4.9 NILGAI : I have not heard of this antelope reported from anywhere in Karnataka recently.

4.10 NILGIRI TAHR : I have never seen or heard of these animals from Karnataka. Even the old British District Gazetteers from this area or old Shikar accounts do not mention them as far as I know. However Davidar (*JBNHS* 75, No. 3) mentions a source who claims to have seen them in Agumbe in 1954. This seems rather curious.

4.11 WILD PIG : Since the wild pig is so ubiquitous it probably occurs in Manchikere and Anekal ranges also.

4.12 TIGER : These sporadically occur in Byndoor 1 (0) and Periyapatna 1 (—) ranges. Recently a case of tiger poaching was detected in Periyapatna.

4.13 PANTHER : I have personally seen panthers in Byndoor and Lakkavalli ranges. Their status is Byndoor 1 (0), Lakkavalli 1 (0), Hosnagara 1 (0), Agumbe 1 (0), Hebri 1 (0), Periyapatna 1 (—). They perhaps occur in many other ranges.

4.14 SLOTH BEAR : They occur in all the six regions. I have seen them in Nagarhole. They have been reported from Lakkavalli, Mudigere, Muthodi, Kudremukh, Sirsi, B.R. Hills and parts of Chitradurga and Tumkur districts.

4.15 STRIPED HYENA : Once common all over the state, they are apparently becoming scarce everywhere. I have seen their tracks in Nagarhole, Muthodi and Periyapatna ranges and have heard them reported from H. D. Kote, Bandipur and Kadur areas. A few years ago they were very common in the coastal districts.

4.16 WOLF : Though becoming rare, wolves are still occasionally reported from the plains. They occur in Ranibennur, Chittapur (Gulbarga district), Nagamangala and other dry tracts of Mandya district and K. R. Nagar

taluk of Mysore district. I have seen the fresh carcase of a wolf run over by a truck near 'Arabithittu' in Hunsur forest range.

4.17 WILD DOG: These do occur at the foot of the western ghats in South Kanara district where I have seen their tracks in most of the jungles. Their population status pro-

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bably is; Periyapatna 1 (—), Karkala 2 (0), Shankaranarayana 2 (0).

5. On the whole, in spite of some minor errors, this paper is a welcome attempt at systematically examining the distribution of wild mammals over a large region and will serve as a good basis for future localised studies in Karnataka.

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#### 9. BLACK-EARED KITE [*MILVUS MIGRANS LINEATUS* (GRAY)] NEAR BOMBAY

The Black-eared or Large Indian Kite [*Milvus migrans lineatus* (Gray)] is well known as a winter migrant to the Indian continent as far south as the Shimoga District, Mysore but most of the records are of single birds. On 22nd March 1981, one of us (H.A.) visited the Deonar Garbage Dumping Ground (with Mrs. Phillippa Mukherjee) and saw several of these kites on the rubbish dumps. When seated, the black patch behind the ear, and the tuft of long loose feathers projecting below the tibio-tarsal joint were distinctive, while in flight the rectangular patch of white on the underwing showed prominently.

Yesterday (about 8.30 a.m.) we were driving eastwards off Trombay Bridge when we saw a number of birds of prey circling high overhead. We stopped to glass them and counted 35 of these kites, whose size and colour could be compared with local pariah kites flying lower and nearer.

There does not appear to be any record of such congregation of this species and which is possibly prior to migration. Similar behaviour has been noticed in gulls in Bombay, but in the evenings.

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NOSHERWAN SETHNA

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